

Servius Tullius is supposed to have used these same structures as the basis of one main voting assembly of the Roman people: the Centuriate Assembly (so called after the centuries), which in Cicero's day came together to elect senior officials, including the consuls, and to vote on laws and on decisions to go to war. Each century had just one block vote; and the consequence (or intention) was to hand to the centuries of the rich an overwhelming, built-in political advantage. If they stuck together, the eighty centuries of the richest, first class plus the eighteen centuries of elite cavalry could outvote all the other classes put together. To put it another way, the individual rich voter had far greater voting power than his poorer fellow citizens. This was because, despite their name – which looks as if it should mean that they comprised 100 (*centum*) men each – the centuries were in fact very different in size. The richest citizens were far fewer in number than the poor, but they were divided among eighty centuries, as against the twenty or thirty for the more populous lower classes, or the single century for the mass of the very poorest. Power was vested in the wealthy, both communally and individually.

In detail, this is not only terribly complicated but also anachronistic. Whereas some of the innovations attributed to Numa might not have been out of place, as we have seen, in early Rome, this is a flagrant projection into the past of much later Roman practices and institutions, complete with Servius Tullius as founding father. The complex system of property valuation entailed in the census is inconceivable in the early city; and the elaborate structures of the centuriate organisation in both army and assembly are totally out of scale with the citizen body of the regal period and with the likely character of its warfare (this isn't how you conduct a raid on the next-door village). Whatever changes in fighting or voting might have been instituted under some 'Servius Tullius', they could not have been anything like what Roman tradition claimed.

Yet by pushing all this back into the formative period of their city,

Roman writers were underlining the importance of some key institutions and key connections in Roman political culture, as they saw it. In the census, they were highlighting the power of the state over the individual citizen, as well as that characteristic commitment of Roman officialdom to documenting, counting and classifying. They were also pointing to a traditional connection between the political and military roles of the citizen, to the fact that for many centuries Roman citizens were also, by definition, Roman soldiers, and to one of the treasured assumptions of many of the Roman elite: namely, that wealth brought both political responsibility and political privilege. Cicero reflects exactly that when he sums up Servius Tullius' political objectives in approving tones: 'He divided the people in this way to ensure that voting power was under the control not of the rabble but of the wealthy, and he saw to it that the greatest number did not have the greatest power – a principle that we should always stand by in politics.' In fact, this principle came to be vigorously contested in the politics of Rome.

### *Etruscan kings?*

Servius Tullius was one of the last three kings of Rome, sandwiched between Tarquinius Priscus and Tarquinius Superbus. Roman scholars believed that they ruled over the city through the sixth century BCE, until Superbus was finally deposed in (according to most accounts) 509 BCE. As we have just seen, parts of the narrative of this period were no less mythologised than the story of Romulus. And there are some chronological impossibilities – or, at least, the usual implausible longevities – in the traditional tale. Even some ancient writers were uncomfortable with the idea that there appeared to be roughly 150 years between the birth of Priscus and the death of his son Superbus, a problem they sometimes tried to solve by suggesting

that the second Tarquin was the grandson, not the son, of the first. Yet from this date on, it does become easier to align some aspects of what we read in Livy and other writers with what has been found in the ground. So, for example, traces of a temple (or temples) that appear to go back to the sixth century BCE have been uncovered in more or less the place where later Roman scholars claimed that Servius Tullius established two major shrines. This is still a long way from being able to say 'We have found the temples of Servius Tullius' (whatever exactly that would mean); but there is at least increasing convergence in the different strands of evidence.

For Romans, however, two things distinguished this group of kings from their predecessors. First was their particularly bloody story: Priscus was murdered by the sons of his predecessor; Servius Tullius was eased on to the throne in a palace coup masterminded by Tanaquil and was eventually murdered by Superbus. Second was their Etruscan connection. For the two Tarquins, this was a case of direct ancestry. Priscus is supposed to have migrated to Rome from the Etruscan town of Tarquinii, along with his Etruscan wife, Tanaquil, to seek his fortune – because he feared, so the story went, that his foreign blood, from his Greek father, would hold back his career in his home town. For Servius Tullius, it was more a case of being the favoured protégé of the Etruscan Priscus and Tanaquil. Cicero is unusual in insinuating, among all the other versions of this king's origins, that he was Priscus' illegitimate son.

The question that has often puzzled modern historians is how to explain this Etruscan connection. Why are these kings of Rome given an Etruscan pedigree? Was there really a period when Etruscan kings controlled the city?

So far we have focused on Rome's neighbours to the south, those that played a part in the foundation stories of Romulus and Aeneas: the Sabines, for example, or the little town of Alba Longa, founded by Aeneas' son and the place where Romulus and Remus were born. But

just to the north of Rome, stretching up into modern Tuscany, lay the heartlands of the Etruscans, the richest and most powerful people in Italy over the period when the first urban community of Rome was



20. Fragments of lifesize terracotta statues from the sixth-century BCE temple often associated with Servius Tullius, depicting Minerva with her protégé Hercules (recognisable from the lion skin around his shoulders). The Etruscans were known for their expertise in terracotta statuary; here the influence of Greek art is also clear – suggesting Rome's contacts with the wider world.

taking shape. The plural (*Etruscans*) is important. For these people did not form a single state but were a group of independent towns and cities which shared a language and distinctive artistic culture; the extent of their power varied over time, but at its widest, Etruscan settlements and recognisable Etruscan influence could be found as far south in Italy as Pompeii and beyond.

Modern visitors to the archaeological sites of Etruria have often been entranced by the romance of the place. The eerie cemeteries of the Etruscan towns, with their lavishly painted tombs, have captured the imaginations of generations of writers, artists and tourists, from D. H. Lawrence to the sculptor Alberto Giacometti. Indeed, Roman scholars of later periods too – after the Etruscan cities had one by one fallen to Rome – could see Etruria both as an intriguingly exotic subject of study and as the source of some of their own ceremonial,



21. One particular skill of the Etruscans was reading signs sent by the gods in the entrails of sacrificial animals. This bronze liver (second to third century BCE) was a guide to interpreting the organs of the victim. The liver is carefully mapped, with the gods concerned with each part clearly identified, to help make sense of the particular characteristics or blemishes that might be found there.

dress and religious practices. But certainly at the period of Rome's earliest history, these 'Etruscan places', to borrow Lawrence's title, were influential, rich and well connected in a way that far outstripped Rome. They had active trading links across the Mediterranean and beyond, as we can see in archaeological finds of amber, ivory and even an ostrich egg on one site, as well as in all the finely decorated classical Athenian pots that have come from Etruscan tombs – far more of these found in Etruria than in Greece itself. Underpinning this wealth and influence were natural mineral resources. There was so much bronzework in the Etruscan cities that even in 1546 enough was discovered at the site of Tarquinii alone to produce almost 3,000 kilos, once melted down, for decorating the church of St John Lateran in Rome. On a smaller but no less significant scale, recent analysis has shown that a piece of iron ore discovered on the island of Pithecusae (Ischia) in the Bay of Naples originally came from the Etruscan island of Elba; to fall back on a modernisation; it was presumably part of their 'export' trade. Rome's position at Etruria's back door helped its rise to wealth and prominence. But was there something more sinister about those Etruscan kings? One suspicious view is that the story of the Etruscan connections of the two Tarquins and Servius Tullius covers up an invasion and takeover of Rome by Etruscans, probably on their way south, as they expanded into Campania. That is to say, the patriotic tradition at Rome rewrote this ignominious period of Roman history as if it revolved not around conquest but around the individual migration of Tarquinius Priscus and his subsequent rise to the kingship. The uncomfortable truth was that Rome had become an Etruscan possession.

This is a clever idea, but most unlikely. For a start, although there are clear traces of Etruscan art and other products in Rome and a handful of inscriptions written in the Etruscan language, there is nothing in the archaeological record to suggest a major takeover: close links between the two cultures, yes; conquest, no. But, perhaps more

to the point, that model of 'state takeover' is inappropriate for the kind of relations we should be envisaging between these neighbouring communities, or at least it is not the only model. As I have already suggested, this was a world of big men and warlords: powerful individuals who were relatively mobile between the various towns of the region, sometimes in a friendly form of mobility, sometimes presumably not. Alongside them there must have been equally mobile members of their militia bands, traders, travelling craftsmen and migrants of any and every sort. Exactly who the Roman 'Fabius' was, whose name is inscribed on his tomb in the Etruscan town of Caere, it is impossible to know; nor can we be certain about the 'Titus Latinus' at Veii or the hybrid 'Rutilus Hippokrates' at Tarquinii, with his Latin first name and Greek second. But they give a clear indication that these places were relatively open communities.

It is, however, the story of Servius Tullius that provides the most vivid evidence of the warlords, the private militias and the different forms of migration, hostile and otherwise, that must have characterised this early society in Rome and its neighbours. It has almost nothing to do with the story of Servius Tullius, the Roman constitutional reformer and inventor of the census. Instead it seems to offer an Etruscan view – and it comes from the lips of the emperor Claudius, in his speech to the senate in 48 CE when he urged its members to allow leading men from Gaul to become senators. One of the arguments he used in support of his case was that even the early kings were a remarkably 'foreign lot'. When he reached Servius Tullius, things got even more interesting.

Claudius knew a good deal about Etruscan history. Among his many learned researches he had written a twenty-volume study of the Etruscans, in Greek, as well as compiling an Etruscan dictionary. On this occasion he could not resist explaining to the assembled senators, who might have begun to feel they were on the receiving end of a bit of a lecture, that outside Rome there was a different version of the

story of Servius Tullius. This was not the story of a man who came to the throne thanks to the favour, or scheming, of his predecessor, Tarquinius Priscus, and Priscus' wife, Tanaquil. For Claudius, Servius Tullius was an armed adventurer:

If we go along with the Etruscan version, he had once been the faithful follower of Caelius Vivenna and a comrade in his adventures; and later, when he had been driven out by a change of fortune, he left Etruria with all that remained of Caelius' militia and seized the Caelian Hill [in Rome], which then became called after his leader Caelius. When he had changed his own name (for his Etruscan name was Mastarna), he was given the name I have already mentioned [Servius Tullius] and took over the kingdom, to the very great advantage of the state.

The details that Claudius gives raise all kinds of puzzles. One is the name Mastarna. Is that a proper name or the Etruscan equivalent of the Latin *magister*, which in this context would mean something like 'boss'? And who is the Caelius Vivenna who is supposed to have given his name to the Caelian Hill in Rome? He and his brother Aulus Vivenna – usually said to have come from the Etruscan town of Vulci – crop up several times in ancient accounts of early Roman history, though in frustratingly incompatible, and typically mythic, ways: sometimes Caelius is a friend of Romulus'; sometimes this pair of Vivennas are dated to the time of the Tarquins; one late Roman writer imagined Aulus becoming the king of Rome himself (so was he then one of the city's lost rulers?); in Claudius' version it looks as if Caelius never made it to Rome at all. But what is clear here is the overall character of what Claudius is describing: rival militias, more or less itinerant warlords, personal loyalty, shifting identities – as different as you could imagine from the formal constitutional arrangements that most Roman writers attributed to Servius Tullius.

We get a similar impression from the set of paintings which once

decorated a large tomb outside Vulci. Now known as the François Tomb (from the name of its nineteenth-century excavator – see plate 7), it must have been the crypt of a rich local family, to judge from its size, with ten subsidiary burial chambers opening off an entrance passage and central hall, and from the substantial quantity of gold found there. But for those interested in early Rome, it is the cycle of paintings in the central hallway – which probably date to the mid fourth century BCE – that make it so special. Prominently featured are scenes drawn from the wars of Greek mythology, largely the Trojan War. Balancing these are scenes of much more local fighting. Each character is carefully named, half of them also identified with the name of their home town, half of them not, presumably indicating that they are men from Vulci, so not needing further identification. They include the brothers Vivenna, Mastarna (the only other certain reference to him that survives) and a Gnaeus Tarquinius ‘from Rome’.

No one has managed to work out exactly what is going on in these scenes, but it is not difficult to get the gist. There are five pairs of fighters involved. In four of these pairs, a local, Aulus Vivenna among them, is running his sword through an ‘outsider’; the victims include Lares Papathnas from Volsinii and that Tarquinius from Rome. This man must surely be something to do with the kingly Tarquins, even though in the Roman literary tradition the first name of both those kings is Lucius, not Gnaeus. In the final pair, Mastarna is using his sword to cut through the ropes binding the wrists of Caelius Vivenna. One odd feature (and presumably a clue to the story) is that all but one of the victorious local men are naked, their enemies clothed. The most popular explanation is that the paintings depict some famous local escapade in which the Vivenna brothers and their friends were taken prisoner, stripped and bound by their enemies but managed to escape and turned their swords on their captors.

This is by far the earliest direct evidence to survive for any of the characters in the story of early Rome and their exploits. It also comes

from outside, or at least the margins of, the mainstream Roman literary tradition. That does not, of course, necessarily make it true; the mythic tradition of Vulci may have been just as mythic as that of Rome. Nevertheless, what we see here gives a much more plausible vision of the warrior world of these early urban communities than do the aggrandising versions offered by Roman writers, and by some of their modern followers. It was a world of chiefdoms and warrior bands, not of organised armies and foreign policy.

### *Archaeology, tyranny – and rape*

By the sixth century BCE, Rome was certainly a small urban community. It is often tricky to decide when a mere agglomeration of huts and houses becomes a town with a sense of itself as a community, with a shared identity and aspirations. But the idea of a structured Roman calendar, and with it a shared religious culture and rhythm of life, most likely goes back into the regal period. Archaeological traces too leave little doubt that by the sixth century BCE Rome had public buildings, temples and a ‘town centre’, which are clear indications of urban living, even if, in our terms, on a small scale. The chronology of these traces remains controversial: there is not a single piece of evidence on whose dating all archaeologists agree; and new discoveries are always altering the picture (though often not quite so significantly as their discoverers hope!). Nonetheless, it would now take a very determined, and blinkered, sceptic to deny the urban character of Rome at this period.

The remains in question are found in several places under the later city, but the clearest impression of this early town is found in the area of the Forum. By the sixth century BCE, its level had been artificially raised and some drainage work had been carried out, in both cases to protect the area from flooding; and at least one or two successive

gravel surfaces had been laid, so that it could function as a shared central space for the community. The inscription with which we started this chapter was found at one end of the Forum, just beneath the slopes of the Capitoline Hill, in what had been an early shrine, with an outdoor altar. Whatever exactly the text means, it was certainly a public notice of some sort, which itself implies the framework of a structured community and recognised authority. At the other end of the Forum, excavations of the earliest levels under a cluster of later religious buildings, including those associated with the Vestal Virgins, have suggested that they go back to the sixth century BCE or even earlier. Not far from there, a few scant remains have been discovered of a series of substantial private houses of roughly the same date. The remains are *very* scant, but they do give a faint glimpse of some well-heeled big men living in style next to the civic centre.

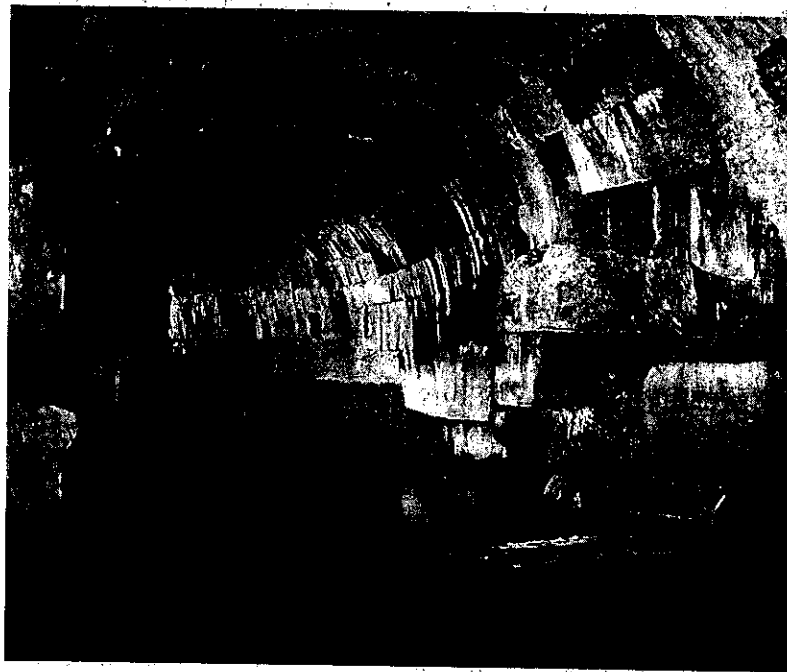
It is hard to know how closely to match these archaeological remains to the literary tradition about the last kings of Rome. It is almost certainly going too far to suggest, as the excavators would like us to believe, that one of those sixth-century BCE houses near the Forum was actually the 'House of the Tarquins', supposing such a thing ever existed. But nor is it likely to be a complete coincidence that the Roman narratives of the last part of the regal period stress the building activities that the kings sponsored. Both of the Tarquins were supposed to have inaugurated the great Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill (later Roman writers found these two kings easy to confuse); and both were said to have built the Circus Maximus and to have commissioned shops and porticoes round the Forum. Servius Tullius, as well as having several temple foundations to his name, was often credited with surrounding the city with a defensive wall. This would be another key sign of a sense of shared community, although the surviving fortification now known as the Servian Wall is for the most part no earlier than the fourth century BCE.

The Italian phrase coined in the 1930s to describe this period, 'La

Grande Roma dei Tarquini' ('The Great Rome of the Tarquins'), may not be so misleading – though it depends a lot, of course, on exactly what is meant by 'Grande'. Rome was still, in absolute and relative terms, far from 'great'. But it was a larger and more urban community than it had been a hundred years earlier, having profited, no doubt, from its prime position for trading and its proximity to wealthy Etruria. So far as we can judge the town's extent in the middle of the sixth century BCE (part of that judgement inevitably comes down to guesswork), it was now substantially bigger than the Latin settlements to the south and at least as large as the largest Etruscan towns to the north, with a population of perhaps 20,000 to 30,000, although it had nowhere near the grandeur of some contemporary Greek settlements in Sicily and South Italy, and was significantly smaller. That is to say, Rome must have been a major player in the region, but it was not yet in any way extraordinary.

Not all the urban developments that Romans ascribed to the Tarquins were splendid in the obvious sense of the word. It was a characteristically Roman concern for the infrastructure of urban life that made later writers hail their achievements in constructing a drain: the *Cloaca Maxima*, or the 'Great(est) Drain'. Quite how much of what survives of this famous structure goes back to the sixth century BCE is far from clear: the substantial masonry sections that it is still possible to explore, and that still carry part of the overflow from the modern city and the detritus from modern bathrooms, are from several centuries later, and it now seems likely that the earliest attempts at some kind of drainage system go back earlier, to the seventh century BCE. But in the Roman imagination the *Cloaca* was always a wonder of Rome that was owed to its final kings: 'an amazing work and more than words can describe' enthused Dionysius, who presumably had in mind what was visible in his day, in the first century BCE. Yet it also had a darker side: it was not just a wonder but also a reminder of the cruel tyranny that for the Romans marked the end of the regal

period. In a particularly lurid, and gloriously fantastical, account, Pliny the Elder (that is, Gaius Plinius Secundus, the extraordinary Roman polymath now best remembered as the one celebrity victim of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE) describes how the people of the city were, so exhausted by the construction work on the drain that many killed themselves. The king, in response, nailed the bodies of the suicides to crosses, in the hope that the shame of crucifixion would be a deterrent for others.



22. A surviving section of the underground *Cloaca Maxima*. The original drain can have been nothing like as grand as this later construction but this is the image that Roman writers had when they wrote of Tarquin's building project. Some Romans boasted of taking boats and rowing along it.

It was, however, not the exploitation of the labouring poor that was supposed finally to have brought the monarchy down, but sexual violence: the rape of Lucretia by one of the king's sons. This rape is almost certainly as mythic as the rape of the Sabines: assaults on women symbolically marking the beginning and the end of the regal period. What is more, the Roman writers who later told the story were probably influenced by Greek traditions, which often linked the culmination, and fall, of tyranny with sexual crimes. In sixth-century BCE Athens, for example, sexual advances by the ruler's younger brother towards another man's partner were said to have led to the overthrow of the Pisistratid dynasty. But mythic or not, for the rest of Roman time the rape of Lucretia marked a turning point in politics, and its morality was debated. The theme has been replayed and reimagined in Western culture almost ever since, from Botticelli, through Titian and Shakespeare, to Benjamin Britten; Lucretia even has her own small part in Judy Chicago's feminist installation *The Dinner Party*, among some 1,000 heroines of world history.

Livy tells a highly coloured tale of these last moments of the monarchy. It starts with a group of young Romans who were trying to find ways of passing the time while besieging the nearby town of Ardea. One evening, they were having a drunken competition about whose wife was best, when one of their number, Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, suggested that they should simply ride back home (it was only a few miles away) and inspect the women; this would prove, he claimed, the superiority of his own Lucretia. Indeed it did: for while all the other wives were discovered partying in the absence of their menfolk, Lucretia was doing exactly what was expected of a virtuous Roman woman – working at her loom, among her maids. She then dutifully offered supper to her husband and his guests.

There was, however, a terrible sequel. For during that visit, we are told, Sextus Tarquinius conceived a fatal passion for Lucretia, and one evening shortly afterwards he rode back to her house. After being

politely entertained again, he came to her room and demanded sex with her, at knifepoint. When the simple threat of death did not move her, Tarquinius exploited instead her fear of dishonour: he threatened to kill both her and a slave (visible in Titian's painting [see plate 4]) so that it would look as if she had been caught in the most disgraceful form of adultery. Faced with this, Lucretia acceded, but when Tarquinius had returned to Ardea, she sent for her husband and father, told them what had happened – and killed herself.

Lucretia's story remained an extraordinarily powerful image in Roman moral culture ever after. For many Romans, it represented a defining moment of female virtue. Lucretia voluntarily paid with her life for losing, as Livy put it, her *pudicitia* – her 'chastity', or better the 'fidelity', on the woman's part at least, that defined the relationship between Roman wife and husband. Yet other ancient writers found the story more difficult. There were poets and satirists who predictably



23. *Pudicitia*, as an important virtue in a woman, was stressed in many contexts. This silver coin of the emperor Hadrian, minted in the 120s CE, shows the personification of *Pudicitia* modestly sitting as a good Roman wife should. Around her, the words 'COS III' celebrate Hadrian holding the consulship for the third time, hinting at a connection between public male prestige and the proper behaviour of women.

questioned whether *pudicitia* was really what a man wanted in a wife. In one bawdy epigram, Marcus Valerius Martialis ('Martial' for short), who wrote a whole series of clever, sparky and rude verses at the end of the first century CE, jokes that his wife can be a Lucretia by day if she wants, so long as she is a whore by night. In another quip, he wonders whether Lucretias are ever quite what they seem; even the famous Lucretia, he fantasises, enjoyed risqué poems when her husband wasn't looking. More serious was the issue of Lucretia's culpability and the reasons for her suicide. To some Romans, it looked as if she was more concerned with her reputation than with real *pudicitia* – which surely resided in the guilt or innocence of her mind, not her body, and would not have been remotely affected by false allegations of sex with a slave. In the early fifth century CE, St Augustine, who was well versed in the pagan classics, wondered if Lucretia had been raped at all: for had she not, in the end, consented? It is not hard to detect here versions of some of our own arguments about rape and the issues of responsibility it raises.

At the same time, this was seen as a fundamentally political moment, for in the story it leads directly to the expulsion of the kings and the start of the free Republic. As soon as Lucretia stabbed herself, Lucius Junius Brutus – who had accompanied her husband to the scene – took the dagger from her body and, while her family was too distressed to speak, vowed to rid Rome of kings for ever. This was, of course, partly a retrospective prophecy, for the Brutus who in 44 BCE led the coup against Julius Caesar for his kingly ambitions claimed descent from this Brutus. After ensuring the support of the army and the people, who were appalled by the rape and fed up with labouring on the drain, Lucius Junius Brutus forced Tarquin and his sons into exile.

The Tarquins did not give up without a fight. According to Livy's implausibly action-packed account, Tarquinius Superbus made an abortive attempt to stage a counter-revolution in the city and, when that failed, joined forces with King Lars Porsenna of the Etruscan town



of Clusium, who mounted a siege of Rome with the aim of restoring the monarchy – only to be defeated by the heroism of its newly liberated inhabitants. We read, for example, of the valiant Horatius Cocles, who single-handedly defended the bridge across the Tiber to block the advance of the Etruscan army (some said he lost his life in the process, others that he returned home to a hero's welcome); and



24. The three surviving columns, from a later rebuilding of the Temple of Castor and Pollux, still make their mark in the Roman Forum. The rest of the temple is largely destroyed but the sloping base of its steps, often used as a place for speakers to address the people, is still visible (bottom left). The little door is a reminder that the basements of temples were used for all sorts of different purposes. Excavations have shown that there was once a barber's shop/dentist in the basement of this one.

of the bravery of Cloelia, one of a group of young hostages taken by Porsenna, who daringly made her way back home by swimming across the river. Livy suggests that the Etruscans were eventually so impressed by the character of the Romans that they simply abandoned Tarquin. There were, however, less patriotic versions. Pliny the Elder was not the only ancient scholar to believe that Lars Porsenna became the king of Rome for a while; if so, he might have been another of those lost kings, and there might have been a very different end to the monarchy.

Deserted by Porsenna, as the standard story runs, Tarquin looked elsewhere for support. He was finally defeated in the 490s BCE (exact dates differ) together with some allies he had made in the nearby Latin towns, at the Battle of Lake Regillus, not far from Rome. It was a triumphant, and certainly partly mythic, moment in Roman history, for the gods Castor and Pollux were supposed to have been seen fighting on the Roman side and later watering their horses in the Roman Forum; a temple to them was erected there in gratitude for their help. Though many times rebuilt, this temple is still one of the landmarks of the Forum, a lasting Roman monument to getting rid of kings.

### *The birth of liberty*

The end of the monarchy was also the birth of liberty and of the free Roman Republic. For the rest of Roman history, 'king', or *rex*, was a term of loathing in Roman politics, despite the fact that so many of Rome's defining institutions were supposed to have their origins in the regal period. There were any number of cases in the centuries that followed when the accusation that he was aiming at kingship brought a swift end to a man's political career. His royal name even proved disastrous for Lucretia's unfortunate widower, who, because he was a relation of the Tarquins, was shortly sent into exile. In foreign conflicts too, kings were the most desirable of enemies. Over

the next few hundred years, there was always a particular frisson when a triumphal procession through the streets of the city paraded some enemy king in all his regal finery for the Roman populace to jeer and pelt. Needless to say, plenty of satire was also directed at those later Romans who happened to be landed with the surname (cognomen) 'King'.

The fall of the Tarquins – sometime, as the Romans had it, at the end of the sixth century BCE – amounted to a new start for Rome: the city began again, now as 'the Republic' (or in Latin *res publica*, meaning literally 'public thing' or 'public affairs') and with a whole series of new foundation myths. One powerful tradition, for example, insisted that the great Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, a building that came to be a major symbol of Roman power and was later replicated in many Roman cities abroad, was dedicated in the very first year of the new regime. True, it had been vowed and, so it was often said, largely built under the kings, by Etruscan craftsmen; but the name of the formal dedicator blazoned across its façade was that of one of the leaders of the new Republic. And whatever the exact chronology of its construction, which is, to be honest, irrecoverable, it came to be seen as a building that shared its birth with the Republic and was a symbol of Republican history itself. Indeed, for centuries there was a Roman custom of each year hammering a nail into the temple's doorpost, not only marking the passing of Republican time but also physically linking that time to the temple's structure.

Even apparently natural features of Rome's cityscape were thought to have their origin in the Republic's first year. Many Romans knew, as well as modern geologists do, that the island in the middle of the river Tiber where it flows through Rome was in geological terms a relatively recent formation. But how, and when, did it emerge? Even now there is no definitive answer to that; but one Roman idea dated its origin to the very beginning of Republican rule, when the grain that had been growing on the private land of the Tarquins was thrown

into the river. Because the water level was low, this piled up on the riverbed and gradually, as it collected silt and other refuse, formed an island. It is as if the shape of the city was born only with the removal of the monarchy.

Also born was a new form of government. As Tarquinius Superbus fled, the story goes, Brutus and, before his imminent exile, Lucretia's husband, Collatinus, straight away became the first consuls of Rome. These were to be the most important, defining officials of the new Republic. Taking over many of the duties of the kings, they presided over the city's politics at home and they led its soldiers in war; there was never any formal separation in Rome between such military and civilian roles. In that sense, despite being paraded as the antithesis of the kings, they represented the continuation of their power: one Greek theorist of Roman politics in the second century BCE saw the consuls as a 'monarchical' element in the Roman political system, and Livy insists that their insignia and badges of office were much the same as those of their kingly predecessors. But they embodied several key, and decidedly unmonarchical, principles of the new political regime. First, they were elected entirely by popular vote, not the half-and-half system of popular involvement that supposedly characterised the choice of king. Second, they held office for only a single year at a time, and one of their duties was to preside (as we saw Cicero doing in 63 BCE) over the election of their successors. Third, they held office together, as a pair. Two central tenets of Republican government were that office holding should always be temporary and that, except in emergencies when one man might need to take control for a short while, power should always be shared. As we shall see, through the centuries that followed these tenets were increasingly reiterated, and became increasingly difficult to uphold.

The consuls also gave their names to the year in which they held office. It goes without saying that the Romans could not have used the modern Western system of dating that I have been adopting in

this book – and for the sake of clarity, readers will be relieved, will continue to use. ‘The sixth century BCE’ would have meant nothing to them. Occasionally they calculated dates ‘from the foundation of the city’, when they had reached some kind of agreement about when that was. But usually they referred to years by the names of the consuls in office. What we call, for example, 63 BCE was for them ‘the consulship of Marcus Tullius Cicero and Gaius Antonius Hybrida’; and wine made ‘when Opimius was consul’ (121 BCE) was a particularly famous vintage. By Cicero’s day, Romans had worked out a more or less complete list of consuls going back to the beginning of the Republic, and it was soon put on public display in the Forum along with the list of triumphing generals. It was largely this roster that enabled them to pinpoint the precise date of the end of the monarchy, as by definition it had to correlate with the date of the first consul.

The Republic, in other words, was not just a political system. It was a complex set of interrelationships between politics, time, geography and the Roman cityscape. Dates were directly correlated with the elected consuls; years were marked by the nails hammered into the temple whose dedication was traced back to the first year of the new regime; even the island in the Tiber was a product, quite literally, of the expulsion of the kings. Underpinning the whole thing was one single, overriding principle: namely, freedom, or *libertas*.

Fifth-century BCE Athens bequeathed the idea of democracy to the modern world, after the Athenian ‘tyrants’ were deposed and democratic institutions established at the end of the sixth century BCE – a chronological match with the expulsion of the Roman kings that was not lost on ancient observers, who were keen to present the history of the two places as if they ran in parallel. Republican Rome bequeathed the equally important idea of liberty. The first word of the second book of Livy’s *History*, which begins the story of Rome after the monarchy, is ‘free’; and the words ‘free’ and ‘freedom’ are

together repeated eight times in the first few lines alone. The idea that the Republic was founded on *libertas* rings loudly throughout Roman literature, and it has echoed through radical movements in later centuries, in Europe and America. It is no coincidence that the slogan of the French Revolution – *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* – puts ‘liberty’ in pride of place; nor that George Washington spoke of restoring ‘the sacred fire of liberty’ to the West; nor that the drafters of the United States Constitution defended it under the pseudonym of ‘Publius’, taken from the name of Publius Valerius Publicola, another of the earliest consuls of the Republic. But how was Roman liberty to be defined?

That was a controversial question in Roman political culture for the next 800 years, through the Republic and into the one-man rule of the Roman Empire, when political debate often turned on how far *libertas* could ever be compatible with autocracy. Whose liberty was at stake? How was it most effectively defended? How could conflicting versions of the freedom of the Roman citizen be resolved? All, or most, Romans would have counted themselves as upholders of *libertas*, just as today most of us uphold ‘democracy’. But there were repeated and intense conflicts over what that meant. We have already seen that, when Cicero was sent into exile, his house was demolished and a shrine of *Libertas* erected on its site. Not everyone would have approved. Cicero himself tells how during the performance of a play on the theme of Brutus, the first consul of the Republic, the crowd burst into applause at a line spoken by one of the characters: ‘Tullius, who underpinned the citizens’ liberty’. The play was actually referring to Servius Tullius and suggesting that liberty might have had a prehistory at Rome before the Republic, under a ‘good king’, but Marcus Tullius Cicero, to give him his full name, was convinced – maybe rightly – that the applause was for him.

Conflicts of this kind form one important theme in the chapters that follow. But before we explore the history of Rome in the first

centuries of the Republic – the warfare at home, the victories for ‘liberty’ and the military victories over Rome’s neighbours in Italy – we must look a little harder at the story of the birth of the Republic and the invention of the consulship. Predictably perhaps, it was not quite as smooth a process as the standard story, which I have given so far, makes it appear.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# ROME’S GREAT LEAP FORWARD

*Two centuries of change: from the Tarquins to Scipio Long-Beard*

HOW DID THE Republic really begin? Ancient Roman historians were experts at turning historical chaos into a tidy narrative and always keen to imagine that their familiar institutions went back much further than they really did. For them the transition from monarchy to Republic was as smooth as any revolution could be: the Tarquins fled; the new form of government emerged fully formed; the consulship was instantly established, providing the new order with its chronology from year one. In reality, the whole process must have been more gradual than that story suggests, and messier. The ‘Republic’ was born slowly, over a period of decades, if not centuries. It was reinvented many times over.

Even the consuls did not go back to the beginning of the new regime. Livy hints that the highest official in the state, and the one whose job it was to bang the nail into the Temple of Jupiter each year, was originally called the chief praetor, although the word ‘praetor’ was later used for a junior official below the consuls. There are other early titles recorded for those at the top of the political hierarchy, which only complicate the picture. These include ‘dictator’, usually described as a temporary position to cope with a military emergency, and without

### **Guiding Questions for *SPQR*, pgs. 109-130**

- 1.** How does Beard explain that it is unlikely that Etruscans have ever ruled Rome in the way that we imagine? Please give two specific pieces of proof (archaeological and logical) that she displays.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2.** At what period would we determine that Rome can be defined as 'urban', and how does Beard define what constitutes proof of urbanism?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3.** List the various urban improvements that Rome undertook to create the foundation for what eventually became the classical city.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4.** What was the underlying issue surrounding the Rape of Lucretia—what was the true catalyst for the overthrow of Tarquin the Proud?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5.** What is the mythical explanation for the formation of the Tiber Island?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6.** What is the Roman method of calculating dating (historical years)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 7.** Name the essential concept that unites Romans' thoughts underpinning government and their society: